

Virtua Walker '87

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Research output: Non-textual form > Digital or Visual Products

474

Downloads

(Pure)

Overview

Fingerprint

Profiles (2)

<https://www.vimeo.com/223285235>

Abstract

Virtua Walker '87 is an experimental VR installation that explores current nostalgia for period game technologies and consumer electronics. Virtua Walker '87 is a playable critique of audience assumptions about VR and the walking simulator genre, informed by Hutcheon's theory of parody (1989).

In the game, players are tasked with walking along a virtual recreation of a real Scottish beach. They control their movement by physically walking on the spot, barefoot inside a custom, sand-filled controller. Player steps are captured by two force sensitive resistors that serve as inputs for the VR-based game. The game world is presented to the player in 2-bit colour (reminiscent of the Nintendo Game Boy), with 8-bit audio and purposefully constrained gameplay. Interaction is limited to walking and looking, with few points of interest along the 4-kilometer stretch of beach.

As a practice-based research project, Virtua Walker '87 sought to explore a number of ideas around virtual reality and walking as a mechanic, including: how contemporary VR can be understood as a form of technostalgia; why VR as a technology often falls short of user expectations in terms of affordances and player control; and how the act of walking is understood and appreciated by players within the wider context of a videogame. Importantly, Virtua Walker '87 aimed to explore dissonant aesthetics in games, contrasting rich tactile experience (the act of walking barefoot on natural materials) with the disenchantment that results from antiquated sound and graphics and a monotonous ludic interface.